

Delaware Flu Fatalities Increase To 11 – Highest Number Of Illnesses In Over Ten Years

DOVER – Although flu season is beginning to wind down, the number of flu-related deaths in Delaware for the 2016-2017 flu season continues to rise. The Division of Public Health (DPH) is announcing three more flu-related fatalities bringing this season's total to 11.

The second week of March, an 83-year-old New Castle County woman, infected with Influenza B, and a 77-year-old Kent County woman, infected with Influenza A, died. The third week of March, a 76-year-old Sussex County woman, also infected with Influenza A, died. All had underlying health conditions in addition to being ill with the flu.

The recent fatalities nearly double the number of flu-related deaths from the 2015-2016 season during which six Delawareans passed away due to flu-related illnesses, but is still significantly lower than the 2014-2015 season when Delaware saw 28 flu fatalities. The overall number of lab-confirmed flu cases this season, however, is the highest in more than a decade.

As of the week ending March 18, there are 3,366 laboratory-confirmed flu cases in Delaware, 1,115 more cases than the 2,251 cases in 2015-2016. Of the 3,366 lab-confirmed cases, 1,650 (49 percent) individuals are from New Castle County, 1,013 (30 percent) are from Kent County, and 703 (21 percent) are from Sussex County. These numbers reflect lab-confirmed cases and the actual number of flu cases in Delaware is likely much higher.

“This year’s flu numbers confirm we have often said about the flu—it’s an unpredictable disease and can impact people differently every year,” said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. “Given we know that we are seeing the highest number of cases in a decade, it’s important the people continue to take precautions to prevent the illness.”

Taking extra precautions and recognizing symptoms of the flu is vitally important, especially for those who have significant medical conditions. If you are experiencing flu-like symptoms and have underlying health problems, you should consult your doctor immediately. DPH also reminded Delawareans that in the 2015-2016 flu season, three flu-related deaths occurred in April, so while the season may be winding down, flu cases, as well as fatalities, are still possible.

Delawareans are encouraged to prevent infection by taking simple everyday measures such as washing hands, using hand sanitizer, covering coughs and sneezes, and staying at home when sick. These efforts help stop the spread of respiratory illnesses including flu. Anyone who has elderly neighbors or relatives should also check in on them regularly, especially if they have experienced flu-like symptoms or have underlying health conditions.

DPH encourages anyone who may be experiencing flu-like symptoms to call, not visit, their doctor. Doctors may be able to prescribe anti-virals by phone. Flu-like illnesses can come on suddenly and include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, and fatigue. While more common in children, some people might also experience vomiting or diarrhea. Some people get complications including pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections. Providers can prescribe anti-viral medicines to make illnesses milder, hasten recovery, and prevent serious complications, hospitalizations, and death. Early anti-viral treatment works best, but may be beneficial for hospitalized patients up to four to five days after symptoms begin.

For more information on influenza prevention, diagnosis and treatment, call DPH at 800-282-8672 or visit flu.delaware.gov.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.